

# Using “Tourism” as a Context for Historical Archeology Sites

## An Example from Yellowstone National Park

William J. Hunt, Jr.

**Y**ellowstone National Park, with its unparalleled concentration of hydrothermal features and dramatic scenic vistas, is awe-inspiring. So much so that 19th-century visitors were led to nickname the park “Wonderland.” The park’s natural features spawn an almost visceral reaction in the visiting public leading many to view Yellowstone as a pristine wilderness virtually untouched by human artifice.

Nevertheless, archeology has revealed evidence for a human occupation in the park for at least 9,000 years with a particularly intense cultural presence over the past 125 years. Yellowstone’s historic past, however, is obscured by the natural and human forces operating continuously in the park, forces which have resulted in the plethora of archeological sites hidden behind an awesome scenery and a strong social bias toward denying the cultural forces operating in a “natural” national park. In short, there is some considerable debate as to the relative importance of cultural forces operating in Yellowstone National Park over time and particularly within the historic frame of reference.

Historical archeology, as a result, has often proved controversial in Yellowstone National Park. Somewhat surprisingly and perhaps somewhat unwittingly, a major contributor to the unsettled character of the “natural versus cultural debate” has been the archeological community itself. Historical archeologists have generally been unable to identify and cogently explain the significance of Yellowstone’s historic sites in terms that non-archeologists can appreciate. This is particularly true of the park’s many garbage dumps, a type of site which is often visually displeasing but contains an incredible amount of information about the park’s previous occupants. The purpose of this

paper is to outline an approach for understanding and assessing the significance of historical archeology sites (including garbage dumps) created as a by-product of a park’s operation—an approach which has proved to be of utility at Yellowstone National Park and one which could be as easily applied to other national, state, and local parks or tourist locales throughout the country.

Of course, assessment of significance is based upon recognition of an appropriate historic context within which a site’s creation and function(s) can be interpreted. Until recently, historical archeologists have struggled to find an appropriate context to apply to Yellowstone’s sites. The causes of this ineffectiveness are doubtless many and complex. Figuring prominently in the problem, however, is the relatively immense scale of the nearly state-sized study area (3,472 square miles) and an extremely diverse historical archeological record. The problem has been compounded by historical archeological projects which have typically been driven by construction or disaster and therefore necessarily of short duration and narrow in scope. As a result, Yellowstone has been subjected to a constantly changing field of investigators who have had little time to become familiar with the park and regional history.

With the advent of the Federal Lands Highway Program in the late 1980s, this situation may have turned around. The program’s goal is to repair, upgrade, and reconstruct Yellowstone’s 329 miles of damaged highways over the

next 20 years. The planning process is incredibly complex, involving a host of federal, state, and local agencies. This bureaucratic complexity has spawned some concern among Yellowstone’s cultural resource managers that unrecognized communication gaps may exist which can impede or obstruct the cultural resource planning process and highway construction. In an attempt to address these issues, the National Park Service (NPS) recently signed a Programmatic Agreement with the State Historic Preservation Offices of Wyoming and Montana and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation outlin-

ing the responsibilities of each agency in the planning process (National Park Service 1993). Among the requirements for Yellowstone National Park was the development of an Archeological Treatment Plan. Assisting the park in meeting this obligation was the NPS-Midwest Archeological Center.

The portion of the completed Treatment Plan addressing historic sites (Hunt 1993) uses a historic context which is not only elemental to the national park system but also demonstrates considerable potential for broad application outside the system. The context is actually drawn from Yellowstone National Park’s 1872 enabling legislation; that

(Hunt—continued on page 26)



McCartney's log cabin "hotel" at Mammoth Hot Springs, built in 1871. The 1872 bill creating Yellowstone National Park placed this site just a few miles inside the park boundary. Photo courtesy Haynes Foundation Collection, Montana Historical Society, Helena.



Camping in the Upper Geyser Basin, 1882. Photo courtesy Haynes Foundation Collection, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

*(Hunt—continued from page 25)*

is, as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people (National Park Service 1933). In essence, Yellowstone is directly tied to a cultural phenomenon known as “tourism.” Consequently, most sites within the original boundaries of the park can be studied, assessed, and interpreted from the context of tourism.

Although unprecedented as a subject of historical archeological inquiry, tourism has been a topic of anthropological inquiry for over 30 years and its appeal to the discipline is both basic and quite natural (Bodine 1981; Nash 1981; Crick 1989). It has been suggested that tourism represents the single largest movement of human populations outside wartime and is therefore a powerful force for culture contact and change (Crick 1989:309-310). Further, the form and goals of tourism are not only culturally determined but they also shift through time and from one culture to the next (Graburn 1989:28). As archeology has traditionally directed the greater portion of its research toward issues of culture change, tourism would seem a natural and entirely valid subject for archeological inquiry.

The model of tourism developed for Yellowstone draws upon the unique history of the national park while borrowing heavily from concepts and terminology in the anthropological literature. It uses a broad definition of tourism in order to maximize its applicability to the greatest number of sites. In essence, tourism is considered that activity characterized by travel, conspicuous consumption, and pursuit of other than normal (secular) activities (Graburn 1989, Robinson 1979, Smith 1981, Turner and Turner 1978).

Economically, tourism can be characterized as marginal, extremely dynamic, and multidimensional. It is marginal in that it is a service industry with no tangible product to export; its work force is largely engaged in tertiary occupations like catering, travel agencies, and so on; and it is often characterized by seasonal unemployment and minimal wages. Tourism is dynamic because it is basically an enterprise governed by fashion. As a result, tourist businesses must be able to adjust quickly to new conditions in order to survive over the long term. Finally, tourism is multi-dimensional in that it is composed of many spatially

separate but nevertheless interdependent elements such as airlines, hotels, restaurants, tour operators, etc. The economic performance of these elements may be quite different from one another with any weak link in the system adversely affecting the otherwise economically healthy elements (Crick 1989:334; Robinson 1979:xxxi, 40).

The structural composition of tourism may be of particular interest to archeologists because tourist activity is reflected in the physical environment via historical sites. This physical environment is composed of at least three interacting sectors—the tourist, the external facilitator, and the internal facilitator (Crick 1989; Nash 1981; Robinson 1989).

The critical sector of the three is obviously the tourist. Tourist behavior can be seen as cyclic with individuals moving physically and ideologically from the “ordinary” to the “extraordinary” and back again. This process brings the tourist in contact with structures established expressly to facilitate their movement through this cycle.

Tourists are a natural focal point for Yellowstone as the park would certainly not exist without them. Tourists affect the park in a variety of ways. Their attitudes and perceptions can affect the form and roles of park management directly via comments and complaints to the management as well as more subtly through the political process. Tourists more directly influence the park’s tour infrastructures. The form and strength of that influence varies according to each tourist population’s mix of economic status, age and sex composition, and availability of leisure time. These variables, for example, restrict and define locations visited, season of tour, length of stay, and range of tourist expectations. These factors in turn influence the quality and types of tourist support facilities and entertainments available.

Historically, tourist populations at Yellowstone have changed dramatically, often within a very short time frame (see Haines 1977). For the first decade or so after the park was created, primitive transportation and support facilities tended to restrict the tourist population to people living near the park and a few very rich from the eastern United States and Europe. Travel assistance was uniformly absent,



Circa 1888 view of the pioneer Marshall-Firehole Hotel, Lower Geyser Basin. Photo courtesy Yellowstone National Park Museum Photograph Collections.



Four-horse coaching party on the road above the Upper Falls, Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, early 1900s. Photo courtesy Haynes Foundation Collection, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

each group having to be self-sufficient throughout their tour. After the late 1870s, transportation routes constructed to and through the park provided ever greater access to Yellowstone. This increase in access escalated the number of tourists from distant areas. Socioeconomic conditions of the time were such that the composition of this population was largely restricted to the upper-middle and upper classes. Consequently, tourist accommodations improved rapidly with the addition of several luxury hotels to meet the expectations of that group.

By the 1890s, transportation and socioeconomic improvements brought greater numbers of the middle class to Yellowstone. This was paralleled by the introduction of lower priced lodges and permanent camps to the accommodation mix. The introduction of the automobile to Yellowstone in 1916 completed the democratization of Yellowstone touring. The touring population quickly came to be dominated by the working and middle classes and free automobile camps were introduced to the park to meet that group's lodging needs. Tourist support facilities became more democratic as a result providing a diversity of hotels, restaurants, campgrounds, and activities suitable to every sector of the tourist populace (Graburn 1989:30-31; Haines 1977:Chapter 22; Robinson 1979:19-20). Immediately after World War II, the transformation of park tourism had been completed. The railroads dropped out of the tourist transportation business and the large hoteliers were reduced to lesser roles in the overall range of tourist support facilities.

These changes in tourist demography should be evidenced in Yellowstone's archeological record as

- a. fluctuations in the ratios of various kinds of lodging ranging from informal and formal campsites to luxury hotels;
- b. variations in accommodation formality and site plan; and
- c. changes in quantity and diversity of foodstuffs and products available to the tourist as demonstrated by artifacts deposited in occupational sites and associated refuse areas.

A second sector in the structure of tourism, the external facilitator sector, is composed of those agencies outside the tour center which identify and promote the center, provide support and supply services to tourists while in route to and from the center, and provide the materials necessary for the internal facilitators to operate. Examples of external

facilitators include tour agencies, railroads, hotels, stage and bus lines, restaurants, etc. This sector can only be indirectly represented archeologically at Yellowstone as its components exist by definition outside the park boundaries. Nevertheless, many of the organizations and the strength of their influence should be represented in the variety, frequency, and types of materials delivered to the park and ultimately deposited in the living areas and park dumps.

The third sector of tourism, the internal facilitator, includes those agencies providing physical support and services to the tourist within the tour center. At Yellowstone, this sector includes elements of park management, transportation, and support and supply, all of which are directly represented in the park's historic sites and overlap to a considerable degree in function.

Park management at Yellowstone has a number of basic responsibilities which it must fulfill. Primary among these are the construction and maintenance of internal access routes (roads and trails), law enforcement, and regulation of concessions. Since the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916, management has also been responsible for interpretation and providing camping facilities. At Yellowstone, sites associated with management responsibilities are related to the military, fish hatcheries, museums and road side kiosks, poacher's cabins, automobile camps, and so on.

The second element of the internal facilitator sector, internal transportation, is intimately connected to the park management, the creators of transportation routes. It is equally connected to the internal support and supply elements which own vehicles and promote transportation through the park. This element is of extreme importance because the mode of transportation controls the scale and character of tourism at Yellowstone (see Haines 1977:Chapters 9 and 17; Culpin 1992:Chapters I-VII).

Internal transportation is composed of two technological entities—location, and form of individual routes; type of conveyance; rapidity of movement; and degree of access to the park's attractions. In addition, the internal transportation element is the primary entity influencing the number and location of tourist accommodations and other support

*(Hunt—continued on page 28)*



The Fountain Hotel (1891-1917), located in the Lower Geyser Basin, was the first luxury hotel built in the park interior. Photo courtesy Yellowstone National Park Museum Photograph Collections.



Tourists at Wylie Permanent Camp Roosevelt, 1915. Photo courtesy Haynes Foundation Collection, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

(Hunt—continued from page 27)

facilities in the park. Sites at Yellowstone associated with this element include road camps, garbage dumps, wagon roads, automobile roads, boat docks, equestrian and pedestrian trails, bridges, quarries, stage stations, barns and corrals, storage structures, water tanks, blacksmith shops, gasoline stations, and so on.

Internal support and supply, the third internal facilitator sector element, is the purview of the park concessionaire. This element is highly dependent upon and constrained by all of the other sectors and sector elements. For example, concessionaires require governmental approval and licensing to operate in the park. They are also dependent upon park management to identify and make accessible those attractions which will draw the public to the vacation area. The companies must then provide support facilities for the tourist which are necessarily founded on at least two additional factors which are at least in part beyond their control; i.e., the internal transportation system and the types of facilities expected by tourists. The type of internal transportation available restricts the concessionaire's choices with regard to location of hotels, luncheon facilities, stores, etc. We have already noted that the range of facilities and services offered to the touring public varies according to that population's demographic mix. Finally, the successful concessions entity must also be able to recognize and address the changing demands of tourists by closely following the fashion and trends of the industry and making appropriate changes in the tourist support facilities. Sites at Yellowstone National Park most directly related to the internal facilitator sector are hotels of various kinds, tent camps, dams and water rams, garbage dumps, storage buildings, restaurants, bathhouses, employee housing stores, logging camps, etc.

In conclusion, Yellowstone and other national parks contain an immense number of historical archeological sites which are complex in their form, content, and functional associations. Faced with this complexity, archeologists have often found themselves somewhat less than successful with regard to developing historic contexts useful for investigating, understanding, and assessing the significance of these resources. The tourism context provides the archeological community and cultural resource managers with a tool which can prove useful in understanding the broad spectrum of historic archeological resources in the

parks. Further, the approach is sufficiently general to allow the context's adaptation and application to other locales where tourism is or has been the major economic focus and where sites relating to the operation and maintenance of the tourist industry can be expected to exist.

## References

Bodine, John J.

1981 Comment on Tourism as an Anthropological Subject by Dennison Nash. *Current Anthropology* 22(5):469.

Crick, Malcom

1989 Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings, and Servility. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18:307-344.

Culpin, Mary S.

1992 History of the Yellowstone Road System. Draft manuscript on file, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.

Graburn, Nelson H.H.

1989 Tourism: The Sacred Journey. In *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (2nd edition), edited by Valerie L. Smith, pp. 21-36. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Haines, Aubrey L.

1977 *The Yellowstone Story*. Yellowstone Library and Museum Association in cooperation with Colorado Associated University Press, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.

Hunt, William J. Jr.

1993 Addendum to Archeological Treatment Plan for Yellowstone Federal Highway Projects, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming: Historical Archeological Resources. In *Archeological Treatment Plan for Yellowstone Federal Highway Projects*, prepared by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, NE, for Yellowstone National Park, Federal Highway Administration, and Rocky Mountain Regional Office, National Park Service, Denver, CO.

Nash, Dennison

1981 Tourism as an Anthropological Subject. *Current Anthropology* 22(5):461-468.

National Park Service

1933 *Laws Relating to the National Park Service: The National Parks and Monuments*. Compiled by Hillory A. Tolson. National Park Service, Washington, DC.

1993 Memorandum to the Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park from the Associate Regional Director, Planning and Assistance, Rocky Mountain Region on the subject Programmatic Agreement, Parkwide Road Improvement Plan, Yellowstone National Park dated Feb. 3, 1993. File code H4217 (RMR-PP).

Robinson, H.

1979 *A Geography of Tourism*. MacDonald and Evans, Estover, Plymouth, England (amended version, first printed 1976).

Smith, Valene L.

1981 Comment on Tourism as an Anthropological Subject by Dennison Nash. *Current Anthropology* 22(5):475.

Turner, Victor and Edith Turner

1978 *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. Columbia University Press, New York.

William J. Hunt, Jr. is a supervisory archeologist, Midwest Archeological Center, National Park Service, Lincoln, NE.